No. 10

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"I am not jealous, dear," he answered. "But I don't like to see you cheapen yourself. If you allow one man to get fresh with you, others will take the same privilege. Don't forget that you are a married woman."

R. of M. C., No. 10.

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AS MARIE glanced at her wristwatch, she discovered that it was not yet quite seven. This would give another hour of precious solitude. With her head bowed she strolled along the lake. Here and there other figures appeared, evidently bent upon enjoying nature at the day's birth.

Among them were two women. Both were well past their youth, and they were talking rapidly.

Marie stepped behind some shrubbery and decided to play a watchful waiting game. As these two women passed her, she scrutinized their faces. She recognized the one. She was a Miss Berger, who had been employed at one time by her next door neighbor, Mrs. Hendricks.

It was as if this woman had been sent by kind providence. Marie pressed a hand against her heart. Here was the longed for chance to get some news about her children. She came boldly from her hiding place and sat on one of the benches.

There was no danger of Miss Berger recognizing in Marie the former Mrs. Philip Gordon, since the latter's features had been changed so completely by Dr. Bell.

As the minutes sped by the two women walked back and forth, evidently exchanging confidences as only women can.

"Oh, if that other woman would only go away so I could speak to Miss Berger," Marie whispered to herself.

That very thing came to pass directly. And now Miss Berger wanting to rest, selected the very bench on which Marie was seated. They glanced at one another, and both nodded in a friendly fashion.

"Lovely morning, isn't it?" Marie began, smiling.

"Very," the other smiled in return, then added,

"I am Miss Berger of Chicago. May I ask your name?"

"Mine is Desmond—Marie Desmond," came back quickly. "My home is in this city. I am employed by Mrs. Hargrave as companion, and I come here every morning to see the sun rise above the lake."

"Oh, it is wonderful," Miss Berger cried with warm enthusiasm. "I expect to do the same thing as long as I am in Milwaukee. You see, I am spending my vacation with an uncle of mine. Well," she added with a deep sigh, "it will be all over in three more days. I hate to think of going back to work."

"One must not hate work," Marie reproved gently. "Honest labor, no matter how menial, has its compensations."

"Not when the woman who is your boss is an old crank," Miss Berger returned testily. "I am now cashier for Mrs. Green, who owns a chain of restaurants in Chicago. You can't imagine what I have to put up with."

Marie looked at the speaker for some little time without making a reply.

Finally she said:

"If your position is so disagreeable, why don't you give it up?"

"Because it pays too well," the other snapped. "And I like it better than being a footwiper for some old society flapper. Believe me, I had my fill of that. The last woman I worked for had an idea that I was a horse."

Marie had to laugh in spite of herself. Then she waited. And what she was waiting for, was not long in coming.

"How would you like it if some four-flushing society woman made you play the maid, butler and dishwasher all in one day?" Miss Berger went on, warming up to the subject. "Well, that is what Mrs. Hendricks did with me. But I wouldn't stand for it unless she

raised my salary. We had a nice little wordy battle, and I quite her cold."

Hearing Mrs. Hendricks' name mentioned, at once sharpened Marie's interest.

"I don't think I would like that kind of treatment," she said sympathetically. "And I don't blame you for leaving Mrs. Hendricks. But I would not speak ill of a former employer. It is——"

"Wouldn't you?" the other interrupted with flashing eyes. "What I have told you is the truth. And I could say some other things which, if Mrs. Hendricks' husband heard it, would land her in the divorce court. Oh, she is a high flyer alright. Her old man is away from home a good deal.

"I wonder what he would say if he knew that his pretty wife allows other men to make love to her in her own home. And I wonder what he would do if he caught her in another man's arms."

"Why, I can hardly believe that," murmured Marie.

"But it is true," Miss Berger snapped. "I have seen it with my own eyes. One night when I came home rather late, I went into the kitchen to get a drink of ice water. I found Mrs. Hendricks making cocktails, and all she had on you could put in your purse. She was so excited when she saw me, that she ordered me to go to my room at once.

"Just the same I took the trouble to look around a bit as I went upstairs. The smell of cigarette smoke told me that a man was somewhere. In the hall I saw a hat and coat on the rack. That ws enough evidence for me. If Mrs. Hendricks is straight, I am St. Peter."

Again Marie was moved to laughter, although the tale she had been listening to horrified her.

She knew that Mrs. Hendricks was a frivolous

sort of a woman, and that she was not above carrying on a mild flirtation. But she was reluctant to believe that this one-time friend and neighbor of hers was morally corrupt.

"By the way," she said after a lengthy pause, and with a furtive glance at Miss Berger, "I was for a short while in the employ of a family who lived next door to Mrs. Hendricks. I worked for the Gordons. Perhaps you have heard of them."

"Have I heard of the Gordons?" Marie's companion exclaimed. "Well, I should say I have. I knew Mrs. Gordon very well by sight. She was a very beautiful woman and all men were wild about her."

"Is that so?" Marie smiled reminiscently, then asked in a low voice: "What is your opinion of her?"

"She was like Mrs. Hendricks—only worse," was the quick retort. "Do you know what she pulled off? She ran off with some skunk by the name of Hoover. Wasn't that a shame? And what a fool she was. She threw away all—her good name, a splendid home, the best of husbands, and two dear little children for the sake of a worthless scamp.

"Everybody pitied poor Mr. Gordon, for he was as fine a man as ever drew breath. I heard that he was heartbroken over the affair. That is the trouble with most society women, they are never satisfied. They are always craving for some new excitement. And then they get themselves into trouble."

Marie had listened to her own fierce denunciation in awed silence.

Her heart beat furiously. For a moment she could scarcely breathe.

"And—and what became of Mrs. Gordon?" she asked faintly.

"She got what she deserved," Miss Berger replied

indignantly. "Her husband run her out and he applied for a divorce. I heard that she went to Gary, Indiana and got a position there. She was killed in an explosion of some kind."

A long pause followed. Marie averted her ghastly pale face and struggled for breath.

Although her mind was in a mad whirl, she could not help wondering how the news of her demise had reached Chicago when she had been employed by the Boswells under her maiden name.

But, she reasoned, men will talk the same as women. It was quite possible that Mr. Shields, her lawyer, had spread the news.

Mr. Shields knew her husband very well. Perhaps he wanted Philip to know that she had met with death so that he might marry again if he chose.

But now, since she had started this conversation with Miss Berger in order to get certain information, she was determined to pursue it to the bitter end. There were several things she was anxious to find out.

"You seem to know so much, Miss Berger," she said in a voice that sounded strange to her own ears. "I am curious to hear how Mr. Gordon——"

"Him?" the other woman snorted. "The poor man nearly lost his mind. The disgrace and notoriety almost killed him. After his wife had left, he shut himself up and refused to see anyone. He used to be such a handsome fellow.

"When he finaly appeared on the street again, he had changed terribly. He was a mere shadow of his former self. They say that the doctor ordered him to go to a different climate."

"Too bad," Marie murmured, when she felt like shrieking at the top of her voice. "I am so sorry for him."

"And so am I," Miss Berger agreed. "Well, he took a trip to Europe with his two lovely children. But I guess he got over his trouble quick enough. I heard that an old sweetheart of his followed him to Paris and he married her."

"Married — married her?" Marie managed to stammer, hardly knowing what she said.

"Of course!" the other affirmed sententiously. "And why not? Wasn't it the most natural thing to do for a man in his position? There were his two children. He had to give them another mother. Most people believe that he made a wise choice when he made Miss Alice Procter his second wife."

A low cry escaped Marie's tightly compressed lips. The perspiration stood in big beads on her forehead.

"Please go on, Miss Berger," she said huskily. "This—this is most interesting. Did I understand you to say that—that Mr. Gordon married an old sweetheart of his by the name of Alice Procter?"

"Exactly. That was her name. The Procters belong to the upper set in Chicago. I suppose there'll be big doings when the newly married couple comes home. Mr. Gordon is one of the best liked men, and his second wife was very popular, so I heard.

"Well," the speaker added with a yawn, "they ought to be happy, for, Lord knows, they got enough money between them. Gordon is said to be a millionaire, and his second wife, I am told, is the only heir to her father's wealth."

Marie was in a daze. For a time she sat, staring into space. Her mind was overwhelmed with an avalanche of bitter thoughts.

A few incoherently mumbled words slipped across her lips. The pallor on her face was ghastly. And then she became conscious that Miss Berger was regarding

her with suspicious eyes.

With an effort that taxed every ounce of her physical as well as mental strength, she pulled herself together.

"I guess I'll have to be going," she said, consulting her wrist watch. "I am really glad I met you, Miss Berger. I hope I may have the pleasure of your company again before you return to Chicago."

Rising quickly, and without waiting for a retort, she walked away.

Chapter 34

A CHILD'S VOICE

HOW MARIE reached the Hargrave residence she never knew. She walked like an automaton, constantly staring blankly ahead. Twice she was nearly struck by a fast moving automobile when she crossed the boulevard. She did not hear the warning shriek of the claxton, nor did she see the pedestrians who passed.

Everything was a maze of moving things. By the time she entered the house, she had a high fever. Once alone in her room, she threw herself across the bed and wept.

It seemed indeed as if the whole world had turned against her. Somehow she could not get used to the idea that Phil had married Alice Procter. Cruel fate had handed her another bitter dose of medicine to swallow.

Old Mrs. Hargrave sat alone at the breakfast table, wondering why her companion was not present to eat with her as usual. The dark frown was no stranger to her face, for she was an impatient woman.

"Alma," she said to the servant bringing in the coffee, "where is Miss Desmond this morning?"

"I don't know," the girl answered.

"Haven't you seen her?"

"No, Mrs. Hargrave."

The mistress of the house toyed with a teaspoon for a moment, the furrow on her brow deepening perceptibly.

"You go upstairs and find out if Miss Desmond is still asleep," she ordered testily. "And if she is, wake

her and say that I have been waiting for nearly fifteen minutes."

"Yes, ma'am." The girl quitted the great dining room.

A few minutes later she returned, and there was a worried look on her honest Irish features. Mrs. Hargrave glared at her.

"Well?" the latter demanded when the girl did not speak at once.

"Miss Desmond is sick," she reported, a note of unmistakable concern in her voice. "She would like to be excused. The poor thing couldn't eat any breakfast anyway. I think she ought to have a doctor. She is burning up with fever."

"Fever?" shrieked the old woman in genuine alarm. "Good Heavens, I hope it is nothing serious. What in the world would I do without her?"

It was natural for Mrs. Hargrave to consider her own discomfort first at all times. Every little inconvenience or neglect on the part of a sevant seemed to annoy her. Nevertheless, she had a good heart.

She never refused to lend a helping hand to a servant in need or distress. And she loved her young companion as much as she was capable of loving any human being.

"Well, I must see her at once," she cried, throwing down her napkin and rising. "You call up Dr. Baldwin and tell him to come right away."

She waddled from the room as fast as her old legs could carry her. Every little excitement and exertion tired her, and by the time she reached Marie's room, she was out of breath.

Her companion was lying on the bed, fully dressed and face downward. Her shaking shoulders betrayed that she was sobbing.

"Why, what is the matter, child?" Mrs. Hargrave asked not unkindly as she bent over the prostrate form.

"Oh, I feel so wretched," Marie answered without changing her position. "I have a terrible headache. I got up with it this morning. I am afraid I took cold. No doubt it is an attack of the grip."

"Well, now, that is too bad," the mistress said soothingly. "But are you sure it is only a headache or a cold? Young women as a rule don't shed tears about a cold. Don't be afraid to tell me what troubles you," she added in a soft tone. "No matter what it is, I'll help you."

Marie did not reply immediately. Nor did she move.

Ah, how she longed to unburden her heavy heart. Ah, how she yearned to tell this kindly woman why she was so utterly miserable.

But how could she without revealing the shameful fact that she was a dicarded wife? What would it avail her to bare her soul to Mrs. Hargrave, a comparative stranger?

"No, it is only a cold," she fibbed. "But, please do not worry about me. I'll be alright in a few days."

"But I am worried," Mrs. Hargrave declared. "And I have sent for the doctor. You better take off your clothes and go to bed. You are not comfortable that way. Let me help you."

There was something almost sweet and decidedly motherly in the manner in which the rich old woman assisted Marie.

It seemed as though she was the servant and the young companion the mistress. Finally the latter lay under the covers, dressed in a filmy gown.

When Dr. Baldwin arrived, he greeted Mrs. Hargrave like an old friend, and at once examined Marie,

Marie trembled. She met his searching eyes bravely. She became aware that he was scrutinizing her features. Had he recognized her voice?

He shook his head repeatedly.

"What is it?" the mistress of the house asked.

"I can't find any symptoms of a cold," he said gravely. "To all appearances the young woman has a bad case of nerves. The heart action is entirely too rapid. What she needs for the next few days is absolute quiet and rest."

"I'll see that she gets that," Mrs. Hargrave replied earnestly.

The physician wrote a prescription and prepared to take his departure. "I'll be back this afternoon about three," he announced as he left.

The unexpected illness of Mrs. Hargrave's companion upset the entire household.

Confusion and apprehension reigned everywhere. The servants missed her kindly advise and gracious smile. Marie had created a vacancy no one else could fill.

Mrs. Hargrave engaged a trained nurse to take care of the patient. The latter's condition failed to improve in spite of the fact that Dr. Baldwin employed every method and means known to medical science.

His first suspicion that Marie's ailment was one of the heart and mind rather than physical, was borne out during his treatment of her.

She had lapsed into a state of mental inertia and complete coma from which nothing could awaken her. Dr. Baldwin's final diagnosis hit the mark.

The patient's illness was chiefly mental, and her condition was aggravated by the deep wound in her heart that no medicine could cure.

The thought that a woman like Alice Procter was usurping her place as mother was utterly unbearable.

And knowing the cold, frivolous and cruelly selfish Alice as she did, Marie had reason to fear for the

welfare of her two beloved children.

In her nameless grief, Marie had prayed that she be relieved of her earthly burden. What could life mean to her now? She had lost everything that made living worth while.

What faint hope she still harbored that perhaps some day she and her husband might be reconciled, was blasted with the news of Philip's second marriage.

And it was bitter indeed to realize that her dangerous rival had succeeded in winning his affection to the extent of becoming his wife.

For weeks Marie lay as one dead. What little nourishment she took was given her with a spoon. Her physical decline was so rapid that Dr. Baldwin gave her up.

"I have done all I could," he said to Mrs. Hargrave, who wept real tears.

And then a strange thing happened.

One day Mrs. Hargrave entered the sickroom with a close friend of hers, a Mrs. Hallam. The latter had with her a little boy of five, a precocious youngster, bubbling with life and mischief.

He was the kind of a chap who can be depended upon to create some sort of a disturbance no matter where he was, and no matter what the conditions might be.

The moment that boy came into the room and spied the beautiful flowers standing in a cut glass vase on the little table beside the bed, he uttered a joyous shriek.

But one shriek scarcely expressed just how he felt. He repeated it twice in rapid succession.

"Hush, Harold," his mother warned. "You must not make any noise. Don't you know that the lady on the bed is very ill?"

The boy instantly approached the bed and gazed with wide, curious eyes at the woman lying there. They suddenly filled with sympathy and he stood for a moment without drawing a breath.

His mother, afraid that little Harold might create further disturbance, hastened to pull him away. He voiced his protest in no uncertain manner. But no one present had the faintest idea what a miracle the child's voice had wrought.

It had awakened the patient from a stupor which might have ended fatally. It was the voice of this boy that stayed the hand of the grim reaper.

The sound had hardly died away when Marie opened her eyes and stared about the room. They rested upon the boy's face.

"Harold, come here!" his mother cried.

Marie's lips moved silently for a moment, and a smile illuminated her pale features.

"Harry—Harry!" she said in a tired voice. "Oh, I am so glad. You—you do not know how happy—you made me. Come, kiss me, you little darling."

The boy did not hesitate. But the moment his lips touched those of the patient, she broke into hysterical weeping.

"Why are you crying, lady?" the lad asked wonderingly.

"Oh, I don't know," Marie answered as she gazed at him fondly. 'But I guess it is because God made you such a nice little boy and you kissed me. You see, I love children."

Mrs. Hargrave and her friend stared at each other, amazed. The nurse came forward and spoke to Marie.

The latter appeared to be perfectly rational. She had taken a hold of the boy's hand, and her eyes closed

again in the first restful sleep since the beginning of her illness.

Dr. Baldwin smiled knowingly when he was told of the strange occurrence.

"That boy saved her life," he declared frankly. "I suggest that he spend an hour each day with her. I suppose Mrs. Hallam could be prevailed upon to let the little chap come."

Mrs. Hargrave was quite sure that such was the case. And it was.

From that day on, Marie showed marked signs of improvement. She learned to smile again with little Harold Hallam her daily visitor. But there were moments, too, when her secret sorrow would burst forth and find expression in tears.

When she was finally able to sit up, and the physician gave her permission to read, most of her time was spent in perusing the Chicago newspapers which kindly disposed servants bought for her. The doing of Chicago society folk interested her as never before.

But what Marie really looked for was some news about those she still loved and lost—her two children. However, she was doomed to disappointment.

The society column occasionally mentioned a reception or an afternoon tea at which Mr. and Mrs. Philip Gordon were present.

The issue of one paper printed a long article which stated that the Gordons were entertaining lavishly at their magnificent summer home, "Oak Manor," and that the beautiful Mrs. Gordon was rapidly becoming popular in her social set.

Unhappy Marie's eyes dimmed with tears as she read this. A feeling of intense bitterness dwelled in her heart.

Life had cheated her. The world had been unfair

in condemning her. Cruel fate had wrongly deprived her of her home and those she loved.

Finally the day came when she was once more able to take her early morning walks to the lake. On one of them, to her great surprise, she encountered the gossipy Miss Berger.

"How do you do," the latter exclaimed when she saw Marie. "I am glad to see you again. But," she added slowly, "you do not look so well."

"I guess I don't," Marie admitted. "I have been very ill."

"Too bad," the other said sympathetically. "Well, I hope I shall see you quite often, for I am frank to confess that I liked you the first time I saw you."

"That is mutual," came back with a forced smile. "But may I ask what you are doing in Milwaukee now? The last time we met you were spending your vacation here. I think that is what you told me. Am I correct?"

"Quite correct," Miss Berger declared with a grin. "You see it is this way: While I was here on my vacation I was tipped off that a very desirable position would be open within three months. I made application for it, was engaged, and started last week. Since the early morning hours are my own, I come here to enjoy a walk and the lake. I think it is perfectly wonderful, don't you?"

"Indeed it is," said Marie. She paused a moment, then asked: "How is dear old Chicago?"

"The same as ever," replied Miss Berger.

"You know, I am keenly interested in some of the folk I formerly worked for," Marie went on with a furtive glance at her companion. "I like to read about them in the Chicago papers. I notice that the Gordons have become rather popular since they returned from Europe."

"I should say they have," was the quick response. "But I am sorry for their two children."

Marie was breathing rapidly.

Unconsciously her hand went out and rested on Miss Berger's arm. She was not at all sure of her voice as she asked:

"Why do you feel sorry for the two Gordon children?"

"They are not getting the proper care," said the other. "The second Mrs. Gordon is so occupied with social duties that she finds no time to devote herself to the children. You know what stepmothers are. Then I heard that she is looking forward to the coming of the stork.

"As a rule a second wife does not love the children of the first. Little Harry and Phyllis are to be pitied. The day will come when they wish they had their own mother back."

The speaker paused for a few seconds to take a long breath then went on with unabated volubility:

"Conditions are not at all what they should be in the Gordon home. I got this straight from a friend of mine who works for them. Mr. Gordon applies himself day after day to make enough money to support his second wife, who is said to be very extravagant. She is a regular society butterfly and as coldly selfish as they make them. She does not want to be bothered with children.

"This is all the more regrettable because Harry, the oldest child, is in poor health. All the people are talking about it, how shamefully he is neglected. He is——" she broke off suddenly. "But for Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" She threw her arms about Marie's swaying form.

"It—it is nothing," the latter gasped, struggling

for breath. "I suppose I am—not quite strong yet. But I—I feel better now, thank you."

She made a pitiful attempt at a smile and failed utterly.

"I — I love children," she murmured, quivering with feverish anxiety. "It always distresses me when I hear that some innocent, helpless little one is abused in some way. This—this Gordon boy—is he really ill?"

"He is indeed," answered Miss Berger, an inflection of sadness in her voice. "As a matter of fact, I was told that there is no hope for him. The doctor seems to think that he is going into tuberculosis. A short time before I left Chicago, I heard that Mrs. Gordon is looking for a capable governess.

"The last one she had did not stay long. I do hope for the sake of those neglected children that a governess is found who will give them a little affection. That's what they need."

Marie was on her feet. She felt that in another minute her self-control must give way.

She felt that she must be alone with her nameless grief and maddening anxiety. Her heart was torn by this frightful news about her own boy.

She steadied her voice sufficiently to say a hurried good-by to Miss Berger, then walked away.

At times, as she dragged her feet wearily in the direction of the Hargrave mansion, it seemed that she was about to collapse. It was the mind that triumphed over the weakness of the flesh.

Once in the seclusion of her room, she gave way to a passionate outburst of despair.

In her agony she called upon God to help her. What she had learned from Miss Berger served to intensify her vain, incessant longing to clasp her beloved boy in her arms.

She did not mind it when he teased her about her extremely short skirts. Their friendship developed into a flirtation which created quite a bit of gossip.

A stepmother had supplanted her. Little Harry was ill and perhaps gliding on to death. Oh, if she could only be with him and her baby girl.

It was a desire for the gratification of which she was ready to make any sacrifice, no matter how great. Yes, like the Spartan mothers of old, she was ready to endure any torture and even forfeit her immortal soul.

It was utterly impossible to keep away from them. The anxietey and the suspense would deprive her of her reason.

And then, suddenly, a thought flashed through her brain. For a moment the daring of it took her breath away. Miss Berger had told her that Philip's second wife contemplated the engaging of a new governess.

What if she applied for that position? There was no reason, so far as she could see now, why she should not be a governess to her own children.

Who knew Marie Desmond? Who would recognize in her the former mistress of the Oak Manor? Capricious fate had caused her features to be changed so that even her closest friends and relatives would not recognize her if they met.

Yes, the thing was possible. And as Marie clung to the idea, determination seized her.

For her children's sake she decided to undertake the desperate task. With her mind fixed, her heart beating, yet calm, she sat down to write a letter of application.

Marie was careful to disguise her handwriting, for Phil might see her letter. It was phrased in a business-like manner, but the underlying note breathed anxiety and a hope that she may be given a chance.

And now three days of torturing waiting followed. They were the longest day Marie, or any other

woman, for that matter, had ever experienced.

At last the longed for message came.

"Your application for the position of governess reached us," the second Mrs. Philip Gordon wrote. "I suggest that you come to Chicago at once for a personal interview. Your expenses for the trip will be paid."

It was easy for Marie to get a day's leave of absence from Mrs. Hargrave. Her heart filled with hope and joy, she boarded a train, that was to take her back to the home of which she once had been the proud mistress.

With her face changed beyond all possible chance of recognition, she was to meet again the man whom she had loved so dearly. But, above all, she was flying to see her children.

Chapter 35

THE NEW GOVERNESS

THE SECOND MARRIAGE of Philip Gordon had not created much of a stir. Most of their friends accepted it as a matter of course. He and Alice Procter had been sweethearts once, and it seemed logical that she should be his first choice when he cast about for someone to mother his two children.

Those with an inclination to criticize found an opportunity in the fact that the wedding took place in Paris. Disappointment, and in some cases, resentment, were the underlying motives.

Alice Procter reached the longed for goal when she became Mrs. Philip Gordon. Perhaps no more radiantly happy and entrancingly beautiful bride ever stepped before the altar.

At the outset she appeared to be a changed woman. She was an affectionate wife. She made such a fuss over the two children that, for a time, they almost seemed to forget that she was a stepmother.

It was such a splendid piece of acting which completely deceived all observers.

Phil Gordon was delighted. If he still mourned the loss of his first wife, he gave no sign of it. Apparently he had found another life's companion whose charming personality and alluring beauty matched that of Marie.

But it was not very long before the real Alice came to the surface.

Her inherent vanity and selfishness were bound

to crop out sooner or later. Phil Gordon got the first taste of it as they were homeward bound on the steamer "Mauretania."

As it happened, there were quite a few celebrities aboard. One of them was a famous tenor of Italian extraction from the Metropolitan Opera Company, New York.

When he was introduced to the Gordons in the dining salon one evening, he made some flattering comment upon Mrs. Gordon's obvious loveliness. From that moment Alice was the Italian's devoted friend and admirer.

She did not mind it when he teased her about her extremely short skirts when they were alone. Their friendship developed into a flirtation which created quite a bit of gossip aboard the big liner.

Phil's mild remonstrations fell on deaf ears.

"Oh, don't be a jealous frump," she told him with a reckless laugh.

"I am not jealous, dear," he answered. "But I don't like to see you cheapen yourself. If you allow one man to get fresh with you, others soon will take the same privilege. Don't forget that you are a married woman."

"Don't worry, I shan't forget," was her none too pleasant retort.

But what happened was exactly what Philip Gordon had said. Alice's conduct with the Italian opera singer gave other men the impression that she was easy to approach.

A well-known New York stock broker became one of her most ardent admirers. He never missed an opportunity to be a few moments alone with her and utter the most extravagant compliments.

And now Alice was in her element. She loved to

be courted and admired. She no longer minded Phil's objections. While he stayed in the cabin with the children, his wife danced.

They arrived in New York just in time to avoid what threatened to be an open scandal.

Alice bid a reluctant farewell to her newly acquired friends and admirers. Phil, hiding his chagrin, hurried her away in a taxi. They boarded a train at once for Chicago.

Upon their arrival at Oak Manor, the magnificent Gordon summer home, Alice assumed the role of its mistress in a manner scarcely becoming to her.

She instantly insisted upon certain changes to be made. She insisted upon inviting every one of her old friends.

It became obvious that she regarded married life as a continuous round of pleasure. She seemed to have become obsessed with an idea that to be a social leader was distinctly worth while.

Alice had ceased being a mother to her two stepchildren. In fact, there were those in the Gordon household who declared that she hated them. And judging by appearances, this indeed seemed true.

And it was worse than true—far, far worse.

Such were the conditions which existed when Marie came to have an interview with the woman who usurped her place.

It was a bright, sunny afternoon when, deeply veiled, she alighted from the train and engaged a taxi to drive her out to Oak Manor. What her thoughts were when she once more saw the stately building in which she had known so much happiness is not hard to surmise.

Her heart was sick with expectation. It beat way up in her throat as the taxi was driven through the spa-

cious grounds and halted at the massive front entrance.

After alighting, she stood for a moment, her hand pressed to her bosom. Would she be able to face the man whom she had loved so passionately—and whom she still loved—without betraying herself?

Would she have enough self-control to refrain from embracing her children, from showing them anything but the kindly interest she was supposed to have in them?

She keenly felt the burden of the cross she had voluntarily taken upon herself. But she drew herself up resolutely. There was no going back now. She must be brave. She rang the doorbell with a hand that trembled in spite of herself.

"I am Miss Desmond," she said to the servant who admitted her. "I have an appointment with—with Mrs. Gordon. I hope I find her home."

It cost Marie a tremendous effort to speak calmly, for the girl before her was an old and tried servant, a fixture in the household for many years. For a moment they stared at each other.

"Mrs. Gordon has been expecting you, Miss Desmond," the girl replied with a smile of welcome. "Please come in and have a seat. I will tell Mrs. Gordon that you are here. And take off your things while you are waiting."

Marie slowly took off her hat and wrap. Her mind was in a whirl.

How could she meet Alice in the role of the second Mrs. Philip Gordon? Surely, she had nothing to fear, for recognition was out of the question. Nature's altering hand had done its work effectively.

She sat in a trance. The voice of the servant startled her.

"Mrs. Gordon will see you," it said.

Praying silently for strength, Marie followed the girl to the drawing room. Ah, how her heart throbbed.

A few seconds more and she would stand in the presence of the woman on whose account she had wrecked her life, and who now held the place in Phil's heart and house that had once been hers.

The door was flung open. She took a deep breath.

"Miss Desmond," announced the girl.

Marie entered with unsteady steps. It was the old familiar drawing room. Leaning back in a comfortable armchair sat the second Mrs. Gordon, a very beautiful creature, lavishly attired.

Bending over her, his arms resting on the back of her chair, stood a man who drew himself up as Marie came in. It was Philip!

Alice rosé.

"Glad to see you, Miss Desmond," she said with charming simplicity as she advanced and held out a hand. "But—I hope you are not ill. You look so pale and you are trembling."

"Oh, it is nothing, Mrs. Gordon," Marie responded faintly, and struggling to keep her composure. "Train rides always make me sick. I generally look pale, and the trip no doubt——"

"Please sit down," interrupted the mistress of the house. "And bring her a glass of water, Phil."

The latter at once did as he was bid. It was a terrible ordeal for poor Marie.

It took every vestige of her reserve strength to keep from crying out aloud when Phil handed her the glass and he looked at her with eyes that were not altogether happy.

"Thanks," she breathed. "I feel—better now."

"Are you quite sure you feel better?" Phil inquired anxiously. "You better take another drink of

water.

"Thanks," Marie whispered.

But she had scarcely touched the water. She was afraid to drink any of it for fear it would nauseate her. But there was one thing that stood out clearly. She had seen Phil start at the sound of her voice.

"God help me," was her fervent mental prayer. "He believes me dead and it is better so."

It was the power of will which carried her safely through the next ten minutes. Marie was perfectly calm as she watched her former husband resume his position back of Alice's chair.

The latter at once began the interrogation, each one of the questions being answered satisfactorily. For reference the applicant gave Mrs. Hargrave of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It appeared that the new mistress of the Gordon home cared little for either a written or verbal recommendation.

"There is only one doubt, Miss Desmond," she said at the conclusion of her quiz. "I am afraid you are not strong enough to take care of two children. One of them is in ill health."

Marie drew herself up and forced a pathetic little smile.

"I am quite strong, Mrs. Gordon," she declared stoutly. "All I ask is an opportunity to show you that I am not a weakling."

And now, for the second time, Marie heard Phil's voice.

"I believe Miss Desmond is capable of any task you may impose upon her, Alice," he said. "However, I would like to know one thing." He turned to his former wife. "Are you fond of children?"

"Why—I—I love them," was the response.

As she uttered these words, Marie trembled.

She met his searching gaze bravely. She became aware that he was scrutinizing her features. Had he recognized her voice.

The next time she spoke, she changed it.

"I have always had a soft spot in my heart for children," she said. "Particularly those in ill health. I hope your boy's case is not serious——"

"How did you know it was our boy?" Philip interrupted.

Marie colored to the roots of her hair.

"I suppose I just guessed it," she declared lamely, and again she became conscious of Phil's searching gaze.

"Guessed it?"

"Yes, Mr. Gordon."

"Then you guessed right, Miss Desmond," he remarked slowly. "Our boy worries me a great deal. What he needs more than anything else is scrupulous care and good nursing."

"He has been getting that," Alice broke in tartly. "Annie always takes the best of care of both children. Of course, I have not been able to look after those youngsters. I am not very strong, you know that. And then there are so many social duties I have to discharge.

"It is not fair for you to insinuate that I have not done my best——" She paused abruptly with a hurt expression on her face.

"Nothing was farther from my mind than to question you doing your duty to the children, dear," Phil said with a tender note in his voice.

Turning to Marie, he went on:

"My wife overrates her strength. There are reasons why she must be very careful. I noticed that the mere sight of our sick boy unnerves her. I don't allow her to see him, and for that reason I would ask you, Miss

Desmond, to take a mother's interest in little Harry."

While Gordon spoke, Marie sat watching Alice keenly.

The pouting lips of the latter and the defiant flash in her eyes, as well as her general attitude denoted selfishness and a callous nature.

"The same Alice," was Marie's mental observation. "She has not changed one bit, except that she has grown more beautiful."

"Then I may consider myself engaged, may I?" she breathed.

"Of course you may," Phil spoke before his wife did. "There is only one more matter to be settled. What salary do you expect?"

"I — I would rather leave that to you and Mrs. Gordon," Marie answered.

Alice, obviously nettled that she did not have the final say in engaging the new governess for the children, interposed harshly:

"That question I will settle after you have served a month on probation. You must realize, Miss Desmond, that unles you prove satisfactory in every particular, I shan't keep you."

Marie nodded her agreement.

"I do not want to stay unless I suit you, Mrs. Gordon," she retorted.

"Oh, I guess you'll do," said Alice carelessly.

"I hope to prove that I am capable of loving children and give them the proper care," answered Marie.

She rose from her seat after speaking.

A sudden wave of emotions threatened to overwhelm her. She felt that she would break down if she remained another minute in the presence of the woman who usurped her place as a wife and mother.

"May—may I see the children?" she managed to

stammer.

"Certainly, you may," Alice returned.

"I'll take you to the nursery, Miss Desmond," Phil offered.

"You will not," his wife broke in rather vehemently. "Don't forget that we are expecting visitors in half an hour. You go to your room and make yourself presentable, Phil."

"Yes, you are right," he acquiesced. "I had forgotten."

Turning to the new governess, the mistress of the house said condescendingly:

"I will ring for one of the servants, Miss Desmond. And as soon as you enter upon your duties, I want you to keep a close watch upon Harry, and report any change you see in him to me at once."

Marie nodded.

A moment later she left the room in the company of a maid who was a stranger to her.

And once out in the corridor the sorely tried woman tried to collect her scattered wits. She pressed both of her hands to her temples and stifled a moan. She followed the girl up the stairs, dragging her feet.

Alone in the drawing room with her husband, Alice turned upon him with a willful toss of her head.

"Well, that is settled, thank goodness," she said. "I think that person will fill the bill. However, there is one fault, she is too good-looking. I'll have to keep an eye on her, and you, too, my dear."

Phil laughed.

"Yes, you better," he replied. "Miss Desmond has a very interesting face. In all frankness I think she is too pretty to be a governess. She ought to be in the movies."

Continued in next number

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